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Report of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations on recent developments in agricultural and rural statistics

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2016/220 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations on recent developments in agricultural and rural statistics. The report includes: (a) a brief report of the Global Strategy Steering Committee on the progress made in the implementation of the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics since the forty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission; (b) a summary of the work undertaken to date by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Agricultural and Rural Statistics; and (c) a report on the preparation of the guidelines for the World Programme for the Census of Agriculture 2020.

The Commission is invited to take note of the report.

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Report of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations on recent developments in agricultural and rural statistics

I. Introduction

1. The present report is aimed at informing the Statistical Commission on the recent achievements in agricultural and rural statistics under the leadership of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and in partnership with key international and regional stakeholders. More specifically, the report describes the methodological development and capacity-building activities undertaken by FAO in various statistical domains. Important methodological improvements are being made, in particular, in the measurement of food consumption, agricultural productivity and sustainability and rural development. These developments will have important implications for the methods to be used for compiling many agriculture-related indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, recommendations are being prepared to provide practical guidance to countries on the modalities for carrying out censuses of agriculture in the 2020 round. Regarding capacity-building activities, FAO, in close collaboration with various partners, has progressively put in place a number of initiatives that will help countries to meet both their basic data needs and the need for additional data to inform the indicator selected for monitoring the agriculture-related targets of the Sustainable Development Goals.

2. The report includes: (a) a brief report of the Global Strategy Steering Committee on the progress made in the implementation of the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics since the forty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission; (b) a summary of the work undertaken to date by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Agricultural and Rural Statistics; and (c) a report on the preparation of the guidelines for the World Programme for the Census of Agriculture 2020.

II. Report of the Global Strategy Steering Committee: progress in the implementation of the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics

3. In this section, an update is provided on the progress made in the implementation of the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics. The report covers five topics: (a) an overall assessment of progress in 2015 and 2016; (b) the functioning of governance mechanisms; (c) the development of cost-effective methods; (d) the implementation of technical assistance and training; and (e) the way forward and priorities for 2017.

A. Overall assessment of progress in 2015 and 2016

4. The implementation of the Global Strategy made excellent progress in 2015 and 2016. Remarkable achievements have been accomplished in developing new

cost-effective methods and tools (50 technical reports and guidelines are available as of the end of 2016) and in the design and testing of the Agricultural Integrated Survey (AGRIS) methodology. At the country level, the regional implementing partners have supported 38 countries in establishing Strategic Plans for Agricultural and Rural Statistics. With regard to the provision of technical assistance at the country level, and in connection with the recommendations from the midterm evaluation, measures have been taken to accelerate the delivery of technical support to countries for the adoption of the cost-effective methodologies developed under the research programme. In this respect, the Africa and Asia-Pacific regions were requested to prepare accelerated plans to guarantee that countries will be exposed to the newest methodologies before the end of the implementation of the first phase of the Global Strategy.

B. Functioning of the governance mechanisms

5. The governance structures established to guide the implementation of the Global Strategy at the global and regional levels are in place. In terms of staffing, the Global Office and the Asia-Pacific regional office, hosted by the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok, are adequately staffed. Lack of adequate resources at the level of other implementing partners has had repercussions in terms of the rate of delivery of the programme. Although some measures were taken to address this issue in the second half of 2016, the impact of these measures on the delivery of the planned activities will, it is hoped, be more tangible in 2017. In terms of coordination, the Global Office has convened quarterly coordination meetings with the various implementing partners aimed at better aligning the activities at the global and regional levels, as well the technical assistance and training activities. Significant efforts have been made to harmonize the training approaches of the Africa and Asia-Pacific regions. The new monitoring framework adopted after the recommendations of the midterm evaluation is now fully operational. In terms of communication, the Global Office, the Asia-Pacific regional office in Bangkok, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP) have been very active in updating the dedicated websites and in regularly dispatching information notes to all stakeholders on the main achievements and results of the programme.

C. Development of cost-effective methods

6. Since the beginning of the implementation of the Global Strategy in 2013, efforts have been made by the Global Office to undertake a comprehensive research programme and prepare guidelines and training material that could be used for supporting the provision of technical assistance to countries and regional training institutions. By the end of 2016, 27 lines of research were completed and more than 50 technical reports and guidelines were disseminated through the Global Strategy website (www.gsars.org). At the end of 2015, following a decision taken by the Global Steering Committee and supported by funding from the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, a new output was added to the research programme of the Global Office: the design and testing of AGRIS, a modular 10-year survey programme targeted at

collecting data from farms, designed as a cost-effective approach to agricultural data collection in developing countries that will help to build comprehensive rural information systems. The methodology will be finalized during the first quarter of 2017 and validated through large-scale field tests in Ghana before the end of 2017.

D. Technical assistance and training

7. Under the technical assistance component, the two regions implementing the Global Strategy have shown significant results in supporting countries in designing their Strategic Plans for Agricultural and Rural Statistics: overall, the African Development Bank (AfDB) has provided support to 24 countries and the FAO Regional Office for Asia-Pacific to 14 countries. To ensure the sustainability of the results by the end of the programme, donors have requested the implementing partners to place less emphasis on supporting Strategic Plans and dedicating more resources to ensure that countries will receive direct technical assistance on innovative cost-effective methodologies, such as the adoption of computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) software for conducting agricultural surveys, measurement of the cost of production, measurement of post-harvest losses, estimation of livestock numbers and livestock products, compilation of food balances and establishment of master sampling frames to help design representative agricultural surveys. In Africa, an accelerated plan was prepared in 2016 and the Global Office was requested to support AfDB in providing technical assistance to African countries, in collaboration with a selected number of regional institutions (Afristat, the Southern African Development Community and the West African Economic and Monetary Union). In the Asia-Pacific region, an accelerated implementation plan for 2017 has also been developed.

8. Under the training component, insufficient staffing has prevented the complete delivery of the work programme in both regions. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) has been instrumental, however, in preparing curricula and syllabi in advanced agricultural statistics methods in support of regional training institutions and in delivering regional short-term courses on master sampling frames. In addition, the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific has introduced in its curricula two workshops on the use of CAPI software for agricultural surveys and on the measurement of cost of production.

E. Way forward and priorities for 2017

9. The first phase of the Global Strategy is planned to be completed by the end of 2017. However, a no-cost extension of this first phase until the end of December 2018 is being discussed with donors in order to ensure the full implementation of the project's action plan and to significantly strengthen countries' capacity in agricultural statistics. This extension will also help the Global Office to complete the production of guidelines and training materials, particularly for the compilation of the agriculture-related indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals agreed upon by the Statistical Commission in March 2016. Finally, it will enable a new task force to be set up by the Global Strategy stakeholders at the beginning of 2017 to benefit from the lessons learned during the implementation of the first phase and

prepare recommendations on a possible second phase of the Global Strategy. Efforts will also continue to advocate and mobilize financial resources for implementation of the programme in the three regions of the Global Strategy (Latin America and the Caribbean, the Near East and Central Asia) which have not benefited from the Global Trust Fund of the Global Strategy.

III. Activities and achievements of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Agricultural and Rural Statistics

10. The forty-third session of the Statistical Commission endorsed the proposal to establish the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Agricultural and Rural Statistics with the following objectives: (a) to facilitate the development of new international statistical standards in the areas of food security, sustainable agriculture and rural development; (b) to facilitate the coordination and integration of statistics on food security, sustainable agriculture and rural development with related international statistical standards from other statistical domains; and (c) to advise the Global Office regarding the research programme of the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics.

A. Improving food consumption measurement

11. During the period 2015-2016, research activities were carried out on "improving methods for measuring food consumption". This work is being led by the World Bank, in close coordination with FAO and the Global Office of the Global Strategy. Activities to date have resulted in the preparation of a volume presenting new research from leading experts in the field, which is expected to be published in the first quarter of 2017.[1] Under the work programme, the Central Bureau of Statistics of Indonesia (Indonesia Badan Pusat Statistik) and the General Statics Office of Viet Nam conducted, with additional funding from the Global Strategy and technical assistance from the World Bank, two experiments using randomized surveys to test new methodologies. The experiments consisted of testing alternative survey methods and comparing them with a benchmark, by way of a randomized assignment to sampled households. The results of these studies will inform the design of national household surveys in both countries and will be published as research papers in academic journals. This body of analytical work is being consolidated into practical guidelines for survey design for endorsement by the members of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Agricultural and Rural Statistics. A first draft of the guidelines was discussed during an expert consultation held at FAO in November 2016, and a revised version will be submitted as a background document to the forty-eighth session of the Statistical Commission and presented at a side event. The final version of the guidelines is slated to be submitted for endorsement by the Commission at its forty-ninth session after a global written consultation has been conducted in 2017.

[1] The volume, provisionally entitled "Food counts: measuring food consumption and expenditures in Household Consumption and Expenditure Surveys", will be published as a special issue in the journal *Food Policy*.

B. Methods for measuring and monitoring agricultural sustainability

12. The research programme on "Methods for measuring and monitoring agricultural sustainability" was presented and discussed at a meeting of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Agricultural and Rural Statistics in March 2016. Taking into account the relevance of the development of an international collection of indicators, methods and procedures for measuring and monitoring agricultural sustainability, a new research thematic domain was inserted into the research component of the Global Strategy 2016 annual workplan. The research domain includes five components: (a) indicators and collection methods for gender-related data; (b) measuring youth employment and decent work in agriculture; (c) indicators and collection methods on agro-environment; (d) measuring agricultural productivity and efficiency; and (e) framework and methods for measuring and monitoring agricultural sustainability. All these research topics are under development, and guidelines will be finalized in 2017.

13. With the agreement reached by the Statistical Commission in March 2016 on the global Sustainable Development Goals indicator framework, the scope of the sustainability research lines were realigned accordingly to also support the Sustainable Development Goals process. Consequently, the scope of the fifth research topic, "Framework and methods for measuring and monitoring agricultural sustainability", was revised and reoriented to focus on the development of methodology and data collection solutions for Sustainable Development Goal indicator 2.4.1, "Proportion of agricultural area under productive and sustainable agriculture". The work is being conducted in close collaboration with FAO to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals indicators under its custodianship. The methodological proposal on indicator 2.4.1 will be discussed and validated at an expert group meeting in February 2017 and submitted to the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators in the first half of 2017. In the second half of 2017, the methodological proposal and data-collection strategies will be field-tested in selected countries to assess their feasibility. The findings of the field tests will be incorporated into the methodological proposal and guidelines will be prepared, reviewed and finalized in 2017.

C. Improving rural statistics

14. Work on rural development has been under way since 2015. The research is aimed at providing a practical definition of rural areas that is nationally relevant and internationally comparable as well as a set of key indicators for measuring and tracking rural development. To leverage a global pool of knowledge and expertise, the research topic is being carried out in coordination with FAO, the United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the International Labour Organization, the World Bank, Eurostat, other international organizations, national statistical offices and independent experts. A literature review and working paper entitled "Conceptual framework and territorial definitions for improving rural statistics" and two technical reports on the social and environmental dimensions of rural indicators have been published in 2016. As from December 2016 (through the first quarter of 2017), work is proceeding on pilot-testing a definition of rural territory created by

combining the geographic information system environment data on global population density and size with land cover classes in a discrete typology in selected countries. The proposed approach to defining rural and urban areas will be submitted to the Statistical Commission through the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Agricultural and Rural Statistics in the first half of 2017. A definition of rural areas and a set of core indicators will be discussed at an expert group meeting, peer-reviewed, field-tested in selected countries and revalidated in the second half of 2017. The final definition and methodology for data collection will be reflected in guidelines and will be submitted for discussion to the Commission in 2018.

IV. World Programme for the Census of Agriculture 2020

15. Through its decennial programmes, FAO provides guidance and technical assistance to countries on the most advanced methods and best practices for conducting their national census of agriculture. Every 10 years, FAO reviews the countries' experiences in conducting censuses and lessons learned, and then prepares, publishes and disseminates the revised census guidelines with improved census methodology. The World Programme for the Census of Agriculture 2020 is the tenth round in the decennial programme of agricultural censuses to be conducted during the period 2016-2025. The decennial programme started in the 1930s, under the auspices of the International Institute of Agriculture, and has continued since the 1950s under the leadership of FAO.

16. Progress in the preparation of the World Programme for the Census of Agriculture 2020 was reported on and discussed at the forty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission held in 2015. The Programme consists of two volumes: volume 1, "Programme, concepts and definitions", which deals with the methodological and conceptual aspects of the census of agriculture; and volume 2, "Operational aspects", which deals with the practical steps involved in actually conducting an agricultural census. The Statistical Commission encouraged FAO to finalize the guidelines for the Programme and invited all countries to participate in the global consultation on volume 1.

17. In late 2015, FAO published volume 1 of the World Programme for the Census of Agriculture 2020.[2] The preparation of volume 1 was based on a review of experiences and lessons learned by countries in the 2010 census round and extensive consultations with national and international experts.

18. Volume 2 of the Programme, which is currently under preparation, provides comprehensive coverage of the main stages and practical aspects involved in the preparation and implementation of the census of agriculture. This is a revised and updated edition of the document entitled "Conducting agricultural censuses and surveys", published by FAO in 1995. As was the case with volume 1, volume 2 will undergo an extensive consultation process. A technical review meeting will be held in January 2017, with the participation of global, regional and country experts, to discuss the current draft of volume 2, which is submitted as a background document to the present session of the Statistical Commission.

[2] Available in all official languages of the United Nations at http://www.fao.org/world-census-agriculture/wca2020/en/.

19. As part of the activities to roll out the World Programme for the Census of Agriculture 2020, FAO has organized regional round tables to disseminate among FAO member countries the new recommendation contained in volume 1. These workshops are aimed at helping countries to gain a deeper understanding of the new approaches to and methodologies for data collection being advocated by FAO through the Programme. Such regional round tables were organized for countries in the Near East (2016), Africa (2016), Asia (2016) and Latin America (2016), and will be organized for countries in Central and Eastern Europe (2017) and the Caribbean (2017).

V. Conclusions

20. The Statistical Commission is invited to take note of: (a) the report of the Global Strategy Steering Committee; (b) the workplan of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Agricultural and Rural Statistics; and (c) the global consultation regarding volume 2 of the World Programme for the Census of Agriculture 2020.